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HISTORICAL SKETCH  
OF  
ANN PAMELA CUNNINGHAM  
"THE SOUTHERN MATRON"

FOUNDER OF  
"THE MOUNT VERNON LADIES' ASSOCIATION"









*Mrs Pamela Cunningham*

First Regent Mount Vernon Ladies' Association.



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Mrs. J. C. Robertson

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*T*O attempt, in a mere profile sketch, to do justice to so remarkable a woman as Miss Cunningham is not possible; only a full-length portrait could offer an adequate conception of her energy and her sacrifice—the obstacles surmounted, the years of discouragement and disappointment bravely met, and the joy of the crowning success.

*This little volume is the loving tribute to the memory of Miss Cunningham upon this the fiftieth anniversary of the initiation of her patriotic effort; an offering from those who have humbly followed her instructions and example, and who hope, in these few pages, to impress the reader with some idea of the priceless gifts bestowed upon the nation by Miss Cunningham in the preservation and protection of the Home and Grave of Washington.*





## Miss Cunningham.

**A**NN PAMELA CUNNINGHAM was a daughter of South Carolina. Her home "Rosemont" was the focus of elegance and refinement, "where she reigned supreme, worshipped as a princess, dominating all by her independence of thought and act—self-reliant and talented," writes one who knew her in health and youth and prosperity as well as in her days of illness and misfortune.

It was upon a clear moonlit night in 1853 that the mother of Miss Cunningham passed by Mount Vernon. The steamer's bell tolled out its requiem to the dead hero, whose resting-place, even under the half-tones of the moonlight, revealed only neglect and desolation. Reflecting sadly in the night silence upon this melancholy scene as it faded in the distance, Mrs. Cunningham realized that unless some immediate



effort were made for the preservation of this sacred spot utter ruin would result. But where should the effort begin? Thinking intently—suddenly, like the flash of the star which shot across the heavens, came the inspiration, "Let the women of America own and preserve Mount Vernon!"

When Miss Cunningham read the letter from her mother containing the proposition she said, "I will do it."

At this time Miss Cunningham was confined to her room a helpless invalid, whose lack of physical strength was compensated by strength of mind and great intellectual ability, accompanied by an enthusiastic, sympathetic nature which accepted no discouragement or rebuff.

When this delicate, sensitive woman declared, "I will do it!" her friends sought, by reason and ridicule, to dissuade her from so wild an undertaking.

Her answer was the letter addressed through our journals to the "Women of America"—an earnest, stirring appeal to their patriotism, urging them to unite in an effort for the rescue and preservation of this neglected Home, this forgotten Grave—to make of Mount Vernon a shrine sacred to the memory of the Father of his Country.

But so great was her shyness and timidity as to lead her to insist upon concealing her identity during the four years of her unceasing efforts under the nom-de-plume of "The Southern Matron."

This initiatory letter was followed by others in quick succession. A newspaper, *The Mount Vernon Record*, was published monthly, giving details of the progress in collecting funds, of the public meetings, private entertainments, and the general and increasing interest shown.

It was in 1853 that Miss Cunningham founded "The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association." She writes: "When I started the Mount Vernon movement it was a Southern affair altogether. My appeal was to Southern ladies. The intention was simply to raise \$200,000; give it to Virginia, to hold title and to purchase 200 acres of the Mount Vernon property, including the Mansion and Tomb—Virginia to keep it for a public resort. The ladies to have it in charge and adorn it if they could have the means." A charter was drawn up and presented to Mr. John Augustine Washington, the owner of Mount Vernon. He refused to agree to this charter. All efforts were for the time paralyzed.

The Northern press now began to notice the move-

ment, but condemned the sectional reserve, claiming that the effort should be a National one, and offering the aid of the Northern States. So great was the clamor that Miss Cunningham yielded, and at once began to extend the powers of the Association by the appointment of ladies as Vice-Regents from each State in the Union, with full powers to appoint committees in their respective States for the purpose of raising money.

"The Southern Matron," as Regent, was to be the head of the Association. But so extensive a work was necessarily slow in organizing. The difficulty of interesting the people was most discouraging. But in 1855 Philadelphia awoke; great enthusiasm prevailed; clubs were formed; boxes for contributions were allowed in Independence Hall; hope revived;—when suddenly the leading men in Philadelphia refused any support to the movement, "because it was a woman's effort, and they disapproved of women mixing in public affairs"! Again discouragement,—but no halt in the onward course of these patriotic women, who fought on against the tide, inspired by their untiring leader.

On the 19th of March, 1856, when in Richmond to deliver his great eulogy on Washington, Mr.

Everett first met Miss Cunningham. So powerful and convincing was the spell of her eloquence, so earnest her patriotism, that when she begged him to aid her he responded by pledging to consecrate his orations henceforth to the Mount Vernon cause. He proved its Providence, giving his great talents, his time, his influence to the scheme, until he placed in the hands of Miss Cunningham, as the result of his exertions, the sum of \$69,064.

Mr. Washington had agreed to part with the 200 acres demanded for the sum of \$200,000; but upon the new charter being offered him, he refused positively to accept its provisions! Thus once again fell the dark cloud of disappointment upon the work.

With the refusal to sell came the refusal of the public to give. Contributions ceased. Distrust and suspicion of the integrity of the Association were freely expressed by the press. Despair fell upon the brave women who were engaged in the work. What to do? where to turn for assistance in this emergency? how to avoid complete failure? how to induce Mr. Washington to part with his historic acres? were questions asked, but unanswered.

Again Miss Cunningham said, "I will do it!" How she did it, how remarkable was her success,

how great the difficulties presented, her eloquent pen describes in the following letter:

" . . . Of course we could do nothing with the public when they believed Mr. Washington would not sell. I proposed to go to Mount Vernon and charm the bear (as I thought him then). Mr. Everett urged this. I had not for many years been on a railroad—the motion made me ill. But I found I could get to Baltimore by canal-boat, from whence the railroad ride would be short. Arrived at Mount Vernon, I was carried in a chair to the house on an awfully hot day in June. I saw the family; was received kindly,—but all my arguments failed, though Mr. Washington promised to meet me in Washington.

"When I got to the wharf the boat had gone and left me! We could just see it. I was put into a sail-boat and towed into the stream, expecting to catch the mail boat, but waited in vain. When I got back to the bank I was nearly dead. But the moment I saw I was left, I said, 'Mount Vernon is saved!' I was carried down to the parlor at night. I talked pleasantly, telling of various incidents connected with Mr. Everett and his Washington lecture, and enlight-



ened the family in a roundabout way as to our proceedings and the interest felt. I could see their amazement. It was a side of the shield they had not seen. I felt I had gained *Mrs.* Washington.

“I shook hands with Mr. Washington; told him it was leap-year, women were bound to have their way. He might resist with all his might, but I knew I was to be victor, and must counsel him to follow the example of his illustrious ancestor, who never acted on a grave affair without having slept on it. Next morning I had a regular talk. The spirit moved me as never before. I never spoke to mortal as I spoke to him. I told him the isles of the sea would send their tributes for Mount Vernon; that he would live to see it, though I would not. (We both did, for Havana and the Sandwich Islands both sent contributions.)

“When I saw I could not shake his resolution against allowing Virginia to buy Mount Vernon, for he was very indignant at that, and considered it would be mean for Virginia to accept the purchase money, I went so far as to point to him the light in which coming generations would view his conduct in preventing our tribute to Washington. I told him his descendants would mourn having descended from him, and I dared say this because I felt that I, by

starting this movement, had been instrumental in placing him in this unpleasant position. He thanked me; said he knew it; but he was as firm as a rock, though he was deeply moved. I could see that he realized his real attitude, and felt it sorely.

"The carriage was waiting—I had to go—the cause was gone! I turned to him, mournfully expressed my grief, but said that I could not leave him without putting myself in proper position. I told him I knew the public had behaved abominably toward him; that the Virginia Legislature had done so also, in framing a charter contrary to the terms he had expressed himself willing to accept; that, apprehensive of this, I had tried to get the address of the Governor, to find in what way he intended to present the subject to the Legislature. The Governor was travelling in West Virginia, and could not be communicated with in time,—thus we had lost eighteen months in inaction and delay. Could I have succeeded, matters would have taken a different form. That as soon as I saw a draft of the charter I realized that it was not what would be agreeable to Mr. Washington. I assured him that I believed all the ladies concerned felt as I did. While we wished to succeed in our beautiful tribute, we were grieved that

his feelings were hurt—insulted—so repeatedly because of it. I looked up to him as I said this. What a change in his face!

“Unawares I had at last touched the ‘sore spot’—the obstacle no money could have removed.

“I now found that he believed the whole thing had been arranged between the Association and Virginia to put an indignity upon him!

“His feelings were wounded, goaded; and lo! in explaining *my* feelings I had shown *him* his error.

“I then told him if he would consent to overcome minor objections, that I would prove to the country the position of the Association by going before the next Legislature and asking it to make any change he required; but he must let the Association pay the money, and not feel that his State or himself were lowered by the act.

“I held out my hand—he put his in mine; then, with quivering lips, moist eyes, and a heart too full to speak, our compact was closed in silence. . . . None but God can know the mental labor and physical suffering Mount Vernon has cost me!

“It was all-important to get Mr. Washington’s consent. Many disappointments followed. It was

January, 1857, before anything was done. By this time the whole subject had passed from public interest, for he had extinguished fires it took hard work to rekindle.

"Our position was painful: the public felt itself deceived—was not willing to give without a surety. Our first charter made payment to Mr. Washington depend on the success of the Association; he required that Virginia should pay him. How were we to get Virginia to do this for us, risk her chance of being paid, unless we had money enough beforehand to justify her confidence?

"Well, with stout hearts we set to work. I had been moved from Philadelphia to Charleston, October, 1856, on an air-bed.

"In March, 1857, we started interest again in Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama; but it took time. Old Charleston city awoke. The Fourth of July was set apart for contributions. Her noblest citizens formed a band to remain in the City Hall during the day to receive contributions. I was proud.

"The ball was now rolling; the action of Charleston had started the country, and we had high hopes of going on swimmingly in the autumn. Mr. Wash-

ington had declared that the matter must be decided at the meeting of the next Legislature, so we were under whip and spur.

"In September came the money panic of 1857. This was a blow. Failure stared us in the face. It was our extremity.

"Mr. Everett came to the rescue. He spoke in all the important towns in every State. I was in desperate health, but to Richmond I must go. Our charter required that the Association should prepare a constitution. I had to go on to present this, but there were doubts whether I should live to get there. A clause was inserted in the constitution to empower 'The Southern Matron' to appoint her successor, in case she died before the organization was completed.

"Starting the last week in December, 1857, after two hours of the journey I began to sink, and until we reached Wilmington, North Carolina, I was held by an open window to be able to breathe. Suffice it to say, I reached Richmond alive, but I have never been the same person since this journey and the wear and tear of that winter's campaign. I was allowed but little time to rest, for we had too little money and must make it up by woman's influence. I was



very low physically, but my spirit seemed to soar on wings.

"The action of Charleston had aroused the nation, and many people came to see me. The Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Virginia was my first visitor; then came different committees. Each one must hear the tale of the Mount Vernon Association, its origin, trials, and the scene with Mr. Washington; few unmoist eyes left my room.

"Before a month had passed all Richmond was excited as never before. We gained friends so fast, it was said we 'bewitched the men.' This excited the ire of Mr. Pryor, M.C., who with a most plausible article in the paper warned the Legislature not to be carried out of its propriety by sentiment and female witchery—to look to the purse of the Association. He stated, 'though the ladies acted in good faith, they could not get money unless the people gave it; and if Virginia paid Mr. Washington as he required, the public would be very indifferent about bestowing money to refund Virginia after they had got their object, viz.: Mount Vernon.'

"There was truth in this, and it acted like magic. I was called upon to answer this immediately.

"The reply I gave created intense excitement.

"In next day's paper Mr. Pryor replied, and yielded in a gallant spirit, *apparently*; but he was so enraged that he swore he would defeat the Association.

"Pryor did defeat us.

*"We lost our bill!"*

"But I had a stronghold in the heart of John A. Washington, and he had written me months before that he was determined to show me how much he appreciated my patriotism. I did not understand the purport of these words then; but when defeat came I sent to beg Mr. Washington to come to me, for I hoped to prove to him that we should succeed if he would trust us and give us time.

"He came at once to tell me that we should have the title. He told me, too, that he knew when the money crash came (1857) that we could not succeed. He told me enough to let me see that what he did was to gratify me.

"I suppose he felt that if we failed no harm was done, as Mount Vernon would still be his.

"We soon entered another bill, and carried it by acclamation March 19, 1858.

"But the wear and tear of the long struggle had been too much for me, and on the day appointed by Mr. Washington for the lawyers and the two Vice-

Regents to meet and witness the signing of the papers in my room, I awoke with a struggle for breath and passed from one convulsion to another for hours.

"The friends were horrified for fear that I should die before all was signed.

"After the lawyers had waited a long time, and even offered to postpone and leave, my system was calmed.

"One of their number was sent to see if I was of sound mind!

"All the papers were read in due form, and then a gentleman knelt beside my couch and held the papers for my signature; my lifeless fingers could hold a pen but a few moments; could only make two or three letters at a time. Finally all was gotten through with, and the papers with my fearful scrawl carried to the archives of the State.

"I was in a mental stupor for three weeks!

"Has not Mount Vernon been bought with a price?"

Miss Cunningham did not remain in a condition of mental stupor longer than the period to which she refers. No one realized so well as she that, with the

signing of the contract which gave the Association the ownership, under the conditions of the charter, of Mount Vernon, the larger work of restoration and repair must begin. She soon roused herself from temporary inaction, and early in 1858 issued an appeal in which she announced that Mount Vernon had now, through the women of America, become the property of the Nation. She gave a brief history of the efforts made to achieve this end, from which I transcribe the following paragraphs:

"A call was made to the women of *the South* to gather around Washington's grave, and like vestal virgins to keep alive the fires of patriotism. The motives were pure, the intentions generous, but it failed! Ye who watch the signs of the times, know ye not wherefore? *Washington belonged not alone to the South!*

"Again a call was made, and this time to the women of the Nation. Again it failed, and wherefore? The title and all the power were to be given to one State, and Washington belonged not to one State alone!

"Devoted woman would be neither baffled nor conquered; but she only triumphs when the common homestead can be procured as a common heritage

for the estranged children of a common father, the spell of whose memory will yet have the power to reunite them around his hallowed sepulchre." In conclusion, Miss Cunningham called upon the people of the Nation "to vie one with another which will give most and do most to enable us on the 22d of February, 1859, to take possession of the Home and the Grave of him who loved the people of all the States—and thus make his birthday the birthday also of Republican gratitude, justice, and fraternal love."

This document was the first signed by her baptismal name, all previous papers having been signed by her pen-name, "The Southern Matron." On this occasion she yielded to the solicitation of Mr. Everett and other friends.

The intervening two years from 1859 to 1861, before the breaking out of the Civil War, were devoted by Miss Cunningham to the more thorough organization of the Association, and to the appointment of additional Vice-Regents to represent the different States at the Council board. For the Vice-Regents she formulated instructions, and drew up a certificate of membership. She also appointed Mr. George W. Riggs as Treasurer. In the selection of representative women for the Board of Regents Miss Cunning-



ham showed great discrimination, and a very able, picturesque group of women, of strongly contrasting personalities, met at the first councils.

Practically the Board of Regents, consisting of the Regent and Vice-Regents representing all the States of the Union, thereby verifying its charter as a National society, is in point of fact *the Association*, which in its executive councils administers upon the estate and represents Mount Vernon's interests in the various States.

The purchase was not completed until February 22, 1859, and only two brief years intervened in which to raise funds for the restorations and repairs at Mount Vernon before the Civil War put an emphatic period to all such efforts.

Writing at this time to a friend, Miss Cunningham's private secretary pays a high tribute to Miss Cunningham's ability, aims, and ideals. She says: "I must be permitted to say, from the intimate relation in which I stand as private secretary to Miss Cunningham, that she is in a peculiar manner mentally constituted for a work novel in kind and holy in purpose, and, as we all hope, destined to be productive of great good in its results. With this hope of counteracting the growing evils of sordid materialism

in our country, a feeble woman, shut out from the world by suffering, caring nothing for the vanities and pleasures that attract others, but with intellectual endowments of a high order, conceives in the quiet of her sick chamber the idea that the time has come for a great moral and political regeneration. The tomb of Washington presents itself to her mind as a talisman by which to aid in effecting this regeneration. The idea may seem chimerical—the result only can prove if it have vital force. With a clear, prophetic spirit she looks far into the future, and she feels instinctively the wisdom or folly of any measure proposed and the precise manner in which the good shall be appropriated or the evil repelled. With these views, the Regent wishes to awaken the best sentiments in the hearts of the people—love, reverence, gratitude; and through these she would have their offerings made for Mount Vernon."

Miss Cunningham's own letters breathe the same ideal patriotism, and after many years one is still thrilled with the spirit that pulsates through the faded ink. In one of her letters to the Vice-Regent for New York, congratulating her upon the readiness with which she understands the spirit of the Association, Miss Cunningham says: "Its virtue lies not in

the simple fact of the purchase through it of Mount Vernon by the Nation, but of its purchase as a heart-offering of love, gratitude, and filial harmony."

High ideals are a people's best inheritance. The ideal of veneration for Washington's Home and Tomb was Miss Cunningham's legacy to the Nation. Its vital power was felt even during the Civil War, when the "Boys in Blue" and the "Boys in Gray" met unarmed at the Tomb of Washington.

And now, as the interest in Mount Vernon grows year by year, the love for Washington's home and memory will always be an influence for union and for strength.

The Regents upon whom Miss Cunningham's mantle has fallen have her broad, high aims before them as an inspiration in their work. She did not limit herself to efforts for the restoration and maintenance of Mount Vernon alone, but through the sentiments inspired by this work to the lifting up of her people to a higher level of patriotism and reverence. No one can limit the influence of the work done at Mount Vernon, for every man, woman, and child who spends an hour within its hallowed precincts goes away with heart stirred by love of Washington, and love of country, which love bears fruit.

Formal possession of Mount Vernon was taken February 22, 1860, but prior to this date repairs had been begun on the place. In May, 1859, the Vice-Regents for New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware met Miss Cunningham and advised with her concerning the necessary repairs to be made, and the work was shortly after begun.

Following the narrative of Miss Cunningham's life, into which much that was National was interwoven, we approach now one of the most momentous and saddest chapters of our National history—the chapter which contains the record of the Civil War. Intense feeling preceded the final rupture between the North and the South. Not alone were passion and prejudice at white-heat among the strong partizans and political leaders, but the Union-loving patriots of both sections were filled with forebodings and alarm. Yet none could foresee the carnage and bitter struggle that followed the firing of the first gun. Many could not realize the possibility of civil war. Peace had become the habit of the Nation, and the people could not conceive of its being broken.

Miss Cunningham may have belonged to this sanguine class, or her absorption in her own great work

of restoration perhaps made her oblivious of the mutterings of the distant thunder that presaged the coming storm. At all events, as late as April 15, 1860, only a year before the fateful gun was fired from Fort Sumter, whose echoes answered from plain and hill-top, and forest and citadel, Miss Cunningham was planning "a grand excursion to Mount Vernon," and, what is equally remarkable, though the atmosphere was vibrating with tense, restrained excitement, she carried out successfully her plans.

The picture she describes on that bright April day, in a letter to a Vice-Regent, of a company of Washington's distinguished men and women, Cabinet officers, and high officials, civic and military, assembled on the green lawn at Mount Vernon to listen to the ardent, patriotic words of fervent orators and to the stirring music of a National band, seems a strange prelude to the devastating war that soon followed. After describing the scene, Miss Cunningham writes: "As all seemed to enjoy the excursion, I trust the good effect of it will not be confined to Washington city. Time will tell whether my hopes (which induced all this daring on my part) are delusive." . . . "I am so grieved to learn of the cause of your not being with us. I can realize as well as sympathize

with your anxiety. I am in daily dread of the same result myself; but I shall have, if it does come, no loving, anxious friend hourly soothing the horrors (I can give no other term) inflicted by overtaxed nerves. It would be a great relief to me to be able to stop work for a while, or to put some one at my post, until my aching head had had a season of rest; but no such prospect is before me." . . . "My old friend the Vice-Regent of Georgia was expected here with Mr. Toombs at five o'clock this morning. Her presence will enable me to leave Washington with satisfaction as soon as some matters are settled."

Several months after this letter are without record; but we know, from the disturbed condition of the country, and the excitement attending the secession of each successive Southern State, in what an atmosphere of apprehension and dread Miss Cunningham lived. November 28, 1860, her secretary wrote to the Vice-Regent for Delaware for Miss Cunningham, who was ill in bed: "Miss Cunningham has been reading the message of the Governor of South Carolina, and while it verifies her expectations, it grieves her deeply, by sweeping away the last faint hope of some arrangement by which the catastrophe of war might be averted."

Miss Cunningham went back to her Southern home, Rosemont, South Carolina, in December, 1860, and during the war administered the affairs of Mount Vernon by letter to Miss Tracy and Mr. Herbert, the resident secretary and superintendent. As the war advanced, however, the difficulty of communicating by letter increased, and there were long intervals when no letters could be sent.

In the winter of 1861 Miss Cunningham, who was suffering from some trouble with her eyes, dictated a letter to a young friend and relative acting as her temporary secretary, giving minute instructions to Miss Tracy and Mr. Herbert concerning the affairs of Mount Vernon and regarding the funds available for the running expenses of the place during the continuance of the war. She directed, in case of the occupation of the region around Mount Vernon by troops of either or both the Union and Confederate armies, that a request should be made of the commanders of both forces to give a pledge for the safety of Mount Vernon; not only as a reward to the women of America for their labor of love in rescuing Mount Vernon, but as a tribute to the Father of his Country. It was undoubtedly in response to this appeal of Miss Cunning-

ham's that Mount Vernon was held sacred by both armies.

Miss Cunningham also advised Miss Tracy "to secure a lady friend to stay with her at Mount Vernon, but if it became unsafe for her, she must return to her friends, leaving Mr. Herbert and the servants in charge." Miss Cunningham added: "If Washington becomes the seat of the terrible conflict, I would advise Mr. Herbert to stop the running of the boat, as the safety of Mount Vernon is of first importance." Mr. Herbert was saved this trouble, as the Government impressed the Mount Vernon boat into its service, and used it as a transport for troops.

In the same letter Miss Cunningham wrote that she would continue to write as long as she could send letters through the Vice-Regent of North Carolina, which State had not then seceded, and when she could not write she would telegraph; but in her isolated home telegraphic communication was not nearer than Augusta, Georgia, sixty miles distant, or Columbia, South Carolina, eighty miles distant. Miss Cunningham could not realize how soon even this method of communication would fail her. She directed that short articles be published in the Washington papers, informing the public of the measures that



have been taken by the Association to secure the sacredness of the only National spot left in the country. Her directions were faithfully observed, and, while churches became military posts and altars were rifled, the soldiers of both armies reverently stacked their arms outside the gates, and met as brothers before the Tomb of Washington.

In a letter to a dear friend, written from Rosemont February 9, 1861, Miss Cunningham enclosed a newspaper clipping in which her return to South Carolina was heralded and her sympathy with Secession assumed. Her horror at the publicity given her name illustrates the change in custom and feeling in the past fifty years. Miss Cunningham wrote: "Conceive of my amazement and distress when the paper was handed to me. You know my horror of publicity for a lady—of her name appearing in the newspapers! When I read the notice, I felt as if I should faint. My friends tried to console me by saying that the paper had no circulation beyond the State, and that the political excitement would be so absorbing that this item would probably be overlooked. This seemed so reasonable that I took courage. But it was, under any circumstances, most improper and indelicate to draw a lady into the political

arena; how much more to do it in connection with her relation to an Association formed to have joint ownership and guardianship of the grave of the Father of all—no matter how our country is divided." This indicates the direction in which Miss Cunningham's sympathies and influence lay; that they were always for unity, and a broad, national patriotism.

She continued: "For the South Carolina editor to throw such a firebrand into our woman's camp was worse than a blunder—it was a crime." In the same letter she gave an account of being asked by an elderly gentleman, "What would become of Mount Vernon, and the Association?" and of replying, "We need not have anything to do with politics—ought not to have; that no sectional divisions should affect our position; that we must bide the storm, and then the officers would meet and pledge themselves to continue in harmony to carry out the purposes for which we were a chartered body, and show to the world that we, at least, had profited by the warning councils of Washington."

Little did Miss Cunningham think, when she left Mount Vernon in response to her mother's urgent appeal, that long years would intervene before she

would see it again—years of waiting and watching; years of heart-breaking sorrow, and anxiety, and privation; years when all communication was cut off, and only a great faith that the end would come and peace again reign in the land sustained her. She wrote in 1861 that she was torn by opposing influences. Her mother, who was a violent Secessionist, urged her resignation of the Regency of the Mount Vernon Association, so that she might devote all of her energies to the care of the plantation, which had become too heavy a responsibility for a woman of her mother's years, broken as she was by the strain of the Civil War. But Miss Cunningham felt that if she should resign, to use her own words, "the election of another officer in the present distracted, embittered state of public feeling would be opening Pandora's box, and perhaps lead in the end to the destruction of the Association. It is not, therefore, to be thought of; but how am I to bear the load that is almost crushing me? I expected to return to Mount Vernon by the third of March. I cannot say now when I can go. I am greatly distressed at my mother's situation, harassed with business cares of a nature entirely new, her sons being away with the army; I fear they will prove too much for her age and infirmities.

She needs some one to lean upon, though it be but such a frail prop as myself. She is bitterly opposed to my going to Mount Vernon, or retaining my office, as it would take me away from her, and be at the utter sacrifice, as it has been and must be, of my own personal interests."

This conflict of feeling between mother and daughter resulted in the compromise of Miss Cunningham's remaining at Rosemont and assuming all the burdens of the management of the plantation that had been too great for the elder lady, and of her retaining also the Regency of the Mount Vernon Association. When we reflect upon what these scraps of letters reveal,—that she was much of the time bedridden, almost blind, and often debarred the use of her hands from rheumatism,—we wonder that she was able to take the double direction of the plantation and Mount Vernon, and that she lived for the work that was yet reserved for her to do.

After this letter of February 25, 1861, two more scraps, undated and unsigned, found their way through the lines. One of these gave directions to Miss Tracy to draw on "the deposit" for the maintenance of Mount Vernon, saying, "I will replace it as soon as I sell my cotton; at present what little money

I can command from any other source is more than needed to buy mules." In the second fragment she sent word to one of the tried friends, "We must abide our time; we have, I trust, a good work yet to accomplish." Her high courage never failed her, and she tried to inspire others with a like courage and hope. In this last fragment of a letter she referred to her brother's family, living only twelve miles distant, and to some of her nieces being always with her, which, she said, "is a great comfort, as now I am half blind."

There was no other letter received until 1864, and our imagination can hardly fill in the gap, or think of it as being other than a dark chasm filled with the ghosts of departed hopes and the shadows of a coming despair. In 1864 Miss Cunningham wrote to her secretary: "This is the third letter I have written to you in reply to yours of January, . . . the first tidings received from you for more than two years. I was dumb with surprise and joy; strange that the important letter, of all written, should have reached me, and so quickly. I was rejoiced to hear of you, that all were well and getting on well, and faithful through all trials to the responsible and precious charge. My faith in you, and Mary, and Mr. Herbert was so

strong that I had learned to be passive after the first year. The rest of your letter pained me beyond expression. I had hoped that the boat would not be interrupted, and that *surrounding circumstances* would make the trips so profitable as to go far towards covering expenses. I tried to go to your relief by arrangements to draw on parties in Liverpool for \$2000. Six months sooner it could have been done. . . . Thank you all for your assurances of faithfulness to me. I felt from the first that you three were sent as special mercies to me from my Heavenly Father. Were not my feelings prophetic? May the All Powerful Father shorten these days of trial and let us meet ere very long. I have been at death's door many times since you have heard from me."

Under date of June 16, 1865, Miss Cunningham wrote Mr. George W. Riggs, Treasurer of the Mount Vernon Association:

"Dear Sir: Owing to extreme ill-health, and other causes, I have been unable for several years to attend in person to my official duties. Yet I have not forgotten nor neglected, so far as circumstances would permit, my responsibilities as Regent of the Association. It is much to be regretted that our Association

had not been successful in acquiring a larger fund for the support of Mount Vernon ere our labors were interrupted; but it is woman's pride and boast not to be daunted by difficulties. We must not be dismayed by our temporary embarrassments. I am rejoiced to be able to inform you that our resources are not yet exhausted. There are in this section funds at interest, because I was unable to transfer them, amounting to \$4000. When apprised February last of the condition of our funds, I endeavored to procure a transfer through an order on a banking-house in Liverpool, but failed. Under these circumstances, it has occurred to me that you would be willing to advance a loan of this amount to the Association to continue to carry out our pious purposes, and I address you by flag of truce to ask this favor of your patriotism, and to thank you for favors already rendered. Time with me but deepens my reverence for the character of Washington, my interest in his home and grave, and my thankfulness that these are under the guardianship of women; may she ever be proud of, and faithful to, this sacred trust, regarding no sacrifices too great to secure its continuance. With me none shall ever be. Those made in the past were very great; those in the future may be greater still;

but I have the spirit and I shall have the strength to meet them, and I hope and believe that my labors will be actuated by the same grateful patriotism. With my kind remembrances to Mrs. R—— and the faithful officers who now keep watch and ward at Mount Vernon, I am,

“Most respectfully yours,

“PAMELA CUNNINGHAM.

“Rosemont, S. C., Jan. 6, 1865.”

Few of us, happily, can realize how high-strung and nervously sensitive was Miss Cunningham's physical organization, though her own vivid accounts give some impression of it. Writing of her condition of health at the close of the war, she deplores her inability to join Miss Tracy at Mount Vernon, the more as the disturbed state of the South immediately after the Proclamation of Emancipation, as well as the expense, would preclude Miss Tracy from coming to her at Rosemont. She says: “Perhaps it is fortunate that we cannot meet, for on Tuesday eve I had to listen to the tale of a heart well-nigh broken, to a strong man's agony as he spoke of his penniless children, and of the failure of effort to support them. I listened, spoke words of hope, and though not a



pulse moved quicker, and I even reproached myself that my heart had grown hard under my own sufferings,—so calm did I suppose myself to be,—in half an hour I was in strong spasms, which were stopped by an opiate for a few hours, only to begin again the next day. What, then, do you think would be the result if you and I were to meet now? Death, I fear. I awoke a few mornings since to feel as if my head was encased in ice. I could have screamed with horror, for I knew too well what it meant. I have not had that feeling since the first winter I went to Philadelphia and was under Dr. H.'s care, some fifteen years ago. Before that time I passed winter after winter with my head wrapped in layers of flannel; I would have to sleep with masks of cotton flannel over my face at night; often I would lie for days with the pillow over my head in dumb torture. If all this is to be encountered again, it will shorten reason, or life. If I know my own self, I have no desire to live. . . . Yet my work is not done, and I want to finish it, and I trust strength may be given me to do so."

While unable to go to Mount Vernon, Miss Cunningham urged Miss Tracy to have appeals made through the papers, and begged the Vice-Regents to

get up entertainments to put money in the depleted treasury.

In a letter to Miss Tracy, October, 1865, Miss Cunningham wrote of the sudden death of a dear old aunt, who occupied a room adjoining her own. Her aunt's death was a great shock to her, and was felt the more deeply because Miss Cunningham said she had never been in the presence of death more than three times in her life. Then, as she wrote, "My aunt was the only one of my kindred left who possessed my born taste for a life of repose absorbed in mental pursuits, and in burying her, oh! I am so much more lonely." We realize from this what a sacrifice of her natural inclination Miss Cunningham made in assuming the cares and responsibilities of an official life that left her but little time or opportunity for the indulgence of her literary tastes.

When the war was over and Miss Cunningham and the Vice-Regents met again in council at Mount Vernon, they were moved to tears at the scene of desolation around them. The Regents were forced to donate and to advance money to maintain the place, and again they set to work to raise funds in their respective States. In this emergency they were deeply indebted to Mr. George W. Riggs, of Wash-

ington city, for advancing funds to aid them in continuing their work. The council determined to try and obtain an indemnity from the United States Government for the use of the Mount Vernon boat during the four years of the war; for, as before stated, during the Civil War the steamboat, which was the chief source of revenue, had been impressed by the United States Government and used as a transport for troops.

The history of the bill for indemnity furnishes another interesting chapter in the life of this indomitable woman. In a letter to the Vice-Regent for Rhode Island, dated July 15, 1868, Miss Cunningham wrote: "As you perceive, I am in Washington; I came here to save our 'claims,' and I think I have succeeded. How little we can foresee what is in store for us! Laboring under a heart disease particularly severe last autumn, I felt I must put aside all private interests and come to Mount Vernon during the winter months, and set to work to arouse interest in Congress and to get all the Vice-Regents to bring all their influence to bear upon their Representatives to carry our 'bill for indemnity' for loss of our boat. All seemed encouraging enough, when 'impeachment' sprang a march upon the whole country.

After that was all over, I realized only too plainly that our poor isolated bill stood but little chance in the midst of embittered parties and the pell-mell method of rushing business. But on the success of our claim depended our only chance of soon arresting the rapid decay of mansion and buildings at Mount Vernon; so, though I had not for twenty years dared to walk up such a long flight of steps as those at the Capitol, I ventured.

"After they had received me and I had been taken to the Speaker's chamber, to which I had been especially invited, I sought an interview with the Speaker, and then with our able friend General Schenck. The Speaker promised all his aid, as did General Schenck, though he privately told me that our bill was lost, though it had a decided majority in the 'House.' (The bill was strongly opposed by Mr. Washburne and others.) He said there was but one hope left for us,—to get it entered in the Senate and passed. That done, it returned to the House to be put on the Speaker's table, from whence it would come before the House—and he would pledge himself to carry it through.

"You can imagine what I felt at this revelation—I, who had been frightened at the flight of steps.

After a few moments of utter dismay I saw my duty, and said to Mr. Phelps (Congressman from Maryland), If you will assist me to reach the Senate side, and will remain with me and see and bring them to me, I will go now. I made a vow that I would succeed, and I have, but at a cost to myself that I did not anticipate. I saw several Senators, finally Reverdy Johnson of Maryland. A few moments' conversation alone were needed with him. He offered to take charge of our claim and see it through the Senate. The bill was sent to the Committee on Claims, and Thursday, July 2d, appointed for its consideration. I promised Mr. Johnson to be present, and on the morning of the 2d I was at my post and sent my card to Mr. Howe, Senator for Wisconsin, chairman of the committee. My secretary and I went into the gallery. I saw Mr. Johnson, paper in hand, standing to catch the eye of the President.

"Next morning I returned full of hope that the Senate would be courteous, but Mr. Howe's face, when he appeared, told me a far different tale. His salutation was, 'The bill is lost.' I exclaimed, 'How is that possible? You promised me the courtesy of the Senate! Have they refused it to the memory of Washington?' He replied, 'No'; that it was requi-

site that some members of his committee should ask him to introduce the bill without further reconsideration. To aid me as he had promised, he had actually asked certain gentlemen to do this and they had refused him. He could do nothing more. As he said this he looked in my face and remarked, 'But you can do it.' I said, 'You think I can succeed? Tell me what; I am ready.' He explained that he needed three members of the committee to put the question named to him, or to empower him to act. I chose three—Mr. Willey, Mr. Garrett Davis, and Mr. Frelinghuysen, at a venture. One by one I carried up my captives, each gentleman giving his assent immediately and courteously.

"The early hour of Saturday was selected to introduce the bill. I was requested to apprise Mr. Johnson to be there to respond. On second thought, feeling that I must not rely on Mr. Johnson alone, who, as he was preparing to go to England, was not much in the Senate, I sent for Mr. Sherman. He was out. I then had an interview with Mr. Sumner. I writhed under the necessity of sending for Sumner, but I did it, and did not hold back my hand when he held out his. Whether the touch of a South Carolinian had some charm in the triumph of the thing to him, I

know not, but he was charming. He told me he felt the greatest interest in the success of the effort, that he was always in his seat, and should stand ready to respond and speak and do his utmost.

"On Monday the bill came up; opposition was bitter, abusive, on sectional grounds, and on Friday the vote had not been taken. On Saturday I was so prostrated that I could not raise my head. Sunday I had fever. Still I went to the Senate on Monday, was late, but heard the remarks of Senators Sumner and Frelinghuysen, but I did not know until I saw the evening paper of the controversy and opposition of General Morrill and others. Tuesday I was ill, but I felt I must meet Mr. Howe to give him the necessary information to enable him to reply to Mr. Morrill; so, with fever on me, I went to the Capitol. It was well I did; our bill would have been lost but for this.

"Our Senators were as ignorant of an Association whose work had filled the newspapers but a few years before as if America had not been the scene of action. They were ferreting out among our archives information of our charter, and had gotten hold of the wrong document. I narrated all our history, explained our organization, and showed him the right

charter. I explained our constitution, drawn up by the lamented James L. Pettigrew, and informed him of the amount of money raised, and how disbursed. I left the Senate reception-room in a high fever, and was violently ill till midnight. About 10 P. M. Mr. Johnson left word that our bill was fixed to come up Thursday, his last day in the Senate, and would pass.

"I had had dumb chills and fever up to Thursday; but that day, aggravated by the excitement, I went to the Capitol with a shaking chill. I reclined on a sofa, but in such a manner as not to attract attention, and, after the chill passed off, I sent for Mr. Sumner (not finding Mr. Johnson), placed my paper (written when ill in bed Wednesday), as a basis of reply in defence of the Association, in his hands, and received his promise to use it if debate permitted. He seemed so surprised to find that I had come to attend to the interests of the Association with a fever on me. No marvel, therefore, that he who was considered so brusque and rough to his opponents should have been so exceedingly gentle and courteous. The bill came up at the last moment, and as Mr. Johnson intimated that it was his last effort, on consideration of there being no debate, the bill was passed without dissent. Think of it! We had no friends and no



party to back us, and business was being pressed forward fearfully; yet, in spite of all, it took only four days from the time it was taken up till the final vote! I felt very proud that there was yet enough power in Washington's memory to enable this feat to be accomplished in a time of intense political excitement."

On Tuesday, the 21st, Miss Cunningham wrote: "We have now to wait on the House. We have warm friends there, and, in pity to me, there have been several efforts made to get the bill up before its turn. General Schenck tried yesterday to get the rules suspended, but he told me it was hopeless unless the 'irrepressible Washburne' could be absent long enough to give him a chance. So our bill may not be reached until Friday, and then I shall leave with no wish ever to have any Congressional business to look after any more. In the meantime I called on President Johnson, to make sure he would not veto the bill."

It appears, however, that Miss Cunningham's hopes of having the bill passed by the House at this time were doomed to disappointment, for we find her writing from Washington in February, 1869, to the Vice-Regent for New Jersey: "Here I am again, leading a 'forlorn hope,' but perseverance may give

us success yet. Our friend Mr. Phelps is so enthusiastic; and, failing in the committee, he is determined upon the bold experiment of bringing our claim before the House by getting it attached to some important bill in the Senate, and it would come to the House at the last moment and be passed, because they would not defeat the whole bill on account of one item." At last her perseverance was crowned with success, and she writes March 8, 1869, to the Vice-Regent for New Jersey: "Congress has granted our claim, and the \$7000 is to be used in repairing the desolation at Mount Vernon. The Vice-Regent for New York and I requested that it be disbursed by General Michler."

This was Miss Cunningham's last victory. With this last supreme effort her work was done, and her mantle fell upon other shoulders. Her delicate physique had been strained to the utmost before her guiding hand let go the helm, and she retired from the Regency in 1874 and left Mount Vernon with just strength enough to reach Rosemont. And there, ministered unto by her mother's old friends and neighbors, she laid her down to rest.

Her farewell address to the Board of Regents at Mount Vernon is in the following memorable words:

*"To the Council of the Ladies' Mount Vernon Association of June, 1874.* LADIES: It was my intention, as well as my duty, to have met you at this time and conformed in person to the legal requisition accompanying a resignation so important as mine; but Providence does not permit.

"But, in parting, I feel it due to you as to me, to the responsibilities I solemnly assumed, which were so important in their results, to those you have taken upon yourselves, to say a few words as to those responsibilities, or duties, laid down in the beginning of our work, not to be lightly regarded, for they were pledges to future generations as well as to ours. The minds and hearts which conceived the rescue of the home of Washington, of the completion of a worthy 'tribute' to public integrity and private virtue, an expression of the gratitude due and felt by a country destined to act such an important part in the drama of the world—conceived it with all the reverence felt in older regions for the resting-places of their honored dead, where only pious hands are permitted to be in 'charge,' so as to have them carried down to admiring ages in the same condition as when left.

"Such was the pledge made to the American heart when an appeal was made to it to save the Home

and Tomb of Washington, of the Father of his Country, from all change, whether by law or desecration. Such to the last owner of Mount Vernon, ere he was willing to permit it to pass from his hands. Such to the Legislature of his mother State, ere she gave us legal rights over it. Such we are bound to keep. Our honor is concerned, as well as our intelligence and legal obligations. The mansion and grounds around it should be religiously guarded from changes—should be kept as Washington left them.

"Ladies, the Home of Washington is in your charge; see to it that you keep it the Home of Washington. Let no irreverent hand change it; no vandal hands desecrate it with the fingers of progress! Those who go to the Home in which he lived and died, wish to see in what he lived and died! Let one spot in this grand country of ours be saved from change! Upon you rests this duty.

"When the Centennial comes, bringing with it thousands from the ends of the earth, to whom the Home of Washington will be the *place* of *places* in our country, let them see that, though we slay our forests, remove our dead, pull down our churches, remove from home to home, till the hearthstone seems to have no resting-place in America,—let them see

that we do know how to care for the Home of our Hero! Farewell!

"Ladies, I return to your hands the office so long held—since December 2d, 1853.

"Respectfully,

"ANN PAMELA CUNNINGHAM.

"June 1st, 1874."

Not alone is this farewell address touching in its dignity and simplicity, and admirable in its far-seeing wisdom, giving as it does the key-note for the guidance of the Association in the future, but it is remarkable for its lack of self-consciousness. Heart-broken as Miss Cunningham was in bidding a last farewell to Mount Vernon and her old tried friends, no word of this escapes her; no lamentation; but, self-forgetting, she is concerned only with the welfare of the Association she founded for the preservation of Washington's Mount Vernon, which she redeemed from desolation.

And herein is that saying true, "One soweth, and another reapeth." Led by a holy inspiration to save the Home of Washington, Miss Cunningham sowed in faith, and toil, and hope deferred, and the people reap the fruit of her labor in the restored Home and Grave of their Great Father.

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